

Summit Blues

Jim Baker's joyless face told the true story of the chill that Mikhail Gorbachev has now cast over the U.S.-Soviet summit next week.

So chastened were the secretary of state's negotiators in Moscow that they refused to rule out a Soviet "walk-back" during the summit or before it begins from positions seemingly agreed to last week. That happened last winter in the few weeks between two of Baker's negotiating sessions.

But the Soviet rigidity that gave Baker's countenance its severity came less from foot-dragging on missiles than from Moscow's refusal to make concessions on German reunification. Baker well knows that this, not arms control issues or Baltic independence, is the gravest problem facing the United States and the West in the new era.

"When Baker asked Gorbachev why he was afraid of a united Germany in NATO, Gorbachev turned the question back and asked Baker why the United States is afraid of a united Germany in the Warsaw Pact," a Soviet source told us.

Getting down to brass tacks on conventional force reductions is vital before the future military status of reunified Germany can be worked out. Gorbachev's reluctance to move at all gave Baker and his team their most revealing view yet of how far Gorbachev is willing to go on the German question. As of now, not far at all.

What the Moscow sessions showed was that as of now 380,000 Soviet troops in East Germany will be withdrawn only at a price unacceptable to Washington. Likewise, Soviet troop withdrawals from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and even Poland are slowing.

U.S.—but not German—diplomatic skeptics here say Moscow may think Germany itself might one day be willing to pay Moscow's price: neutrality, a status that could terminate the presence of American troops in Europe.

On Baltic independence, the second level in last week's super-tough Moscow talks, Baker had a hard time of it despite making full use of his justifiably famed negotiating skills. Gorbachev still has a week left in which to start or at least announce serious independence talks. But Baker learned that the great mass of Soviet people, no matter how angry over food shortages and eco-

nomic misery, do not want to shrink Soviet borders any more than they want to unleash Germany.

If independence talks are not agreed on before next Wednesday, Gorbachev will find himself in murderous political fire on Capitol Hill and may face demonstrators everywhere. That could cost him what he wants more than anything else: a trade deal from the United States, particularly most favored nation status reducing tariffs on Soviet exports. Until Baltic independence is on track, Congress will fight Bush on economic concessions.

The third and least important layer of the Moscow talks was arms control, the subject of the rosy headlines. Kremlin aides warned during the talks that the Soviet parliament might refuse to ratify START (strategic arms reduction treaty) if Moscow did not get its way on range limits for air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) and other disputed questions. The specious reason: the Russian people, having taken many falls the past year, cannot be asked to take second-best on START.

That is normal bargaining procedure. Yet in Moscow, the United States accepted a 600-kilometer range limit, down from the 1,500-kilometer U.S. starting position, if the Soviets would exempt the radical new U.S. ALCM called Tacit Rainbow. But Tacit Rainbow is not nuclear. It should not even be an issue in START.

Likewise, Baker left Moscow with no answer to two Soviet strategic mobile missiles, a key component for surprise attack. The United States has none. Paul Nitze, the respected former U.S. negotiator, took issue with an administration argument that since surprise nuclear attack is no longer to be worried about, the Soviet missiles are unimportant. "Surprise attack is the only kind there ever will be," he told us.

Baker's grim visage made sense after such harrowing negotiations. The question now is not whether George Bush can do better but whether he can keep what little Gorbachev gave.